I. Scope and Purpose

For better or worse, talk and politics go together, evident in the phrase, “You talk like a politician.” It’s no exaggeration to say that for many people, this phrase is not a compliment, and that the connection between talk and politics is not a good thing. After all, we’ve all heard people describe political talk as “empty rhetoric.” Yet most of us also take it for granted that not only should politicians talk to each other and their fellow citizens, but that how we talk – or don’t talk – to each other has implications for phenomena ranging from trust to civility to good and bad policy outcomes.

Why is it the case that talking and politics – especially democratic politics – seem to go together? Why is it that so many of us distrust political talk, and view rhetoric as at best empty, and at worst dangerous? What is rhetoric in the first place? What role does it play in politics? What role should it play in politics, and how we think about politics? Could we have politics without rhetoric? And if we could, should we? Or is our effort to temper the potentially harmful effects of rhetoric futile, if not fraught with risk?

These are some of the questions that we will take up in this seminar over the course of the semester. Through readings, class discussions, films, and presentations, we will explore the problematic place of rhetoric in western political theory. Our approach will be both historical and thematic. We will begin with democratic Athens, turning next to Renaissance Italy and 17th century England, followed by 18th century America, and concluding with several works of recent political inquiry. In doing so, we will read a number of classic works of political thought, written by authors including Hannah Arendt, Plato, Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and George Orwell. This course is part of the Politics and Rhetoric First Year Interest Group, along with Philosophy 210 (Professor Forster) and ILS 205 (Professor Avramenko).

II. Evaluation

A. Participation (20%)

As a seminar, the success of this course depends on the quality of participation and preparation of those who take part. Because participation and preparation are essential, participation will count for 20% of the course grade. Mere attendance is insufficient: doing well
in seminar means participating actively and thoughtfully, and it also means coming prepared. You will not be able to make meaningful contributions to class discussions unless you have both done the reading and bring the reading to class with you. You will also need to be physically present. That being said, any number of things can occur that will prevent you from coming to class, and so every participant in the seminar can miss 2 classes without excuse and without penalty.

B. Papers (40%)

All students in this class will write 2 short (6-8 pages, 1500-2000 word) papers. These papers are to be analyses of a work of popular culture through the lens of one of the course readings. As such, you can write a paper about a novel, song, album, television show, film, play, poem, opera, painting, or other similar works of art or literature. Your papers must develop readings of the selected works that focus on rhetoric and its political, ethical, or social implications. Papers on any given reading will be due in the class period after we complete the reading. For example, if you want to write a paper using Machiavelli as your primary source, it would be due on Monday, 10/8. The papers are to be double spaced, written in Times New Roman, 12 point font, using black ink, and stapled. Please include the word count on the first page of your paper. Papers that do not meet these specifications will not be accepted. While you have a good deal of flexibility in terms of when you can write your papers, you need to turn in at least one paper by 10/23, roughly the midpoint of the semester.

Please note: papers will not be accepted late; if you miss the due date for any particular author, you will need to write a different paper. Do not email me your paper; I will not print it out to grade it.

C. Projects (15%)

All students in this class will present to the class independent projects on one of the following three days - 11/26, 11/28, or 12/3. These projects will center on the analysis of a piece of political oratory contained in one of the two volumes of American Speeches, edited by Tim Widmer, and on reserve in College Library (call number E183 A498 2006). While we will discuss these projects and presentations many times over the course of the semester, the broad purpose of the project is to analyze a work of political rhetoric, using the theories and concepts from this class, along with Philosophy 210 and ILS 205, and to present your analysis of the speech to the class.

D. Final (25%)

All students in this class will take a final exam, to be held on December 19 from 12:25 to 2:25 pm.

III. Class Expectations
You can expect me, as your instructor, to come to class prepared, to be available for assistance during office hours or by mutually convenient appointment, to answer email and phone correspondence in a reasonable amount of time (provided your email uses proper punctuation, grammar, spelling, appellation, and is signed), to provide feedback on your performance, to hand back written work in a reasonable amount of time, and to provide clear instructions and guidelines.

I expect you, as students, to come to class prepared to engage in discussion and on time, to be attentive and respectful in class, to check your university-registered email regularly, to read and understand the syllabus and other course guidelines, in addition to adhering to all university policies and policies stated in the syllabus. Students may not use laptops in this class; students using cell phones or similar devices will be asked to leave, and will receive a zero for participation that day.

**Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and will be dealt with severely.**

**IV. Movie Nights**

To supplement and enrich our readings and discussions in keeping with the spirit of the FIG program, I will hold three movie nights in a common room of one of the dorms – one on Tuesday, October 2; one on Tuesday, October 30; and one on Tuesday, December 4. Each will be held from 6:30 pm to approximately 9:30 pm. On each of those nights, we will eat dinner together and watch and discuss a film (such as *Rashomon*, *12 Angry Men*, or *Thank You For Smoking*) dealing with rhetoric. You must attend 2 of 3 sessions, though you are welcome to attend all 3.

**V. Grading**

Grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

- \[ A \geq 93.5 \]
- \[ AB = 87.5-93.4 \]
- \[ B = 82.5-87.4 \]
- \[ BC = 77.5-82.4 \]
- \[ C = 69.5-77.4 \]
- \[ D = 60-69.4 \]
- \[ F \leq 59.9 \]

**VI. Materials**

There are seven required books for this course, listed below in the order that we will be reading them:

- Plato, *Gorgias* (ISBN 9780872200166)
Fishkin. *When the People Speak* (ISBN 9780872201774)


Mutz. *Hearing the Other Side* (ISBN 9780521612289)

In addition, the materials for several days can be accessed online (and free) via hyperlinks noted on each of those days below.

*This syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations may occur.*
VII. Schedule of Readings and Discussions

Wednesday, 9/5: No reading; course introduction

Monday, 9/10: Setting the Stage: Arendt, “Truth and Politics”
Reading available via:

Wednesday, 9/12: The Quarrel between Rhetoric and Philosophy: Plato, Gorgias (Please read the dialogue with Gorgias and Polus, up to the point that Callicles enters the conversation)

Monday, 9/17: Plato, cont’d (Please read Socrates’ dialogue with Callicles to the conclusion)

Wednesday, 9/19: Rhetoric, Reason, and Judgment: Aristotle, Rhetoric (Book I; feel free to skip or skim Chapter 7)

Monday, 9/24: Aristotle, cont’d (Book I; Book II)

Wednesday, 9/26: Aristotle, (Book II; Book III, Chapters 1-12)

Monday, 10/1: Acting Rhetorically: Machiavelli, The Prince

Wednesday, 10/3: Machiavelli, cont’d

Monday, 10/8: The Truth Shall Overcome: Milton, Areopagitica
Reading available via: (http://files.libertyfund.org/files/103/1224_Bk.pdf)

Wednesday, 10/10: Ruling Rhetoric and Ruling Rhetorically: Hobbes, Leviathan, 1-7

Monday, 10/15: Library session; meet at 2:30 in Memorial 231

Wednesday, 10/17: Hobbes, Leviathan, 10-15


Wednesday, 10/24: Hobbes, Leviathan, cont’d

Monday, 10/29: Good Sense Despises the Adulator: Federalist Papers (selections to be determined)
Reading available via: (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sub menus/fed.asp)

Wednesday, 10/31: Federalist Papers, cont’d

Monday, 11/5: Bringing Rhetoric Back In, Part 1: Fishkin, When the People Speak

Wednesday, 11/7: Fishkin, cont’d
Monday, 11/12: Bringing Rhetoric Back In, Part 2: Allen, *Talking to Strangers*

Wednesday, 11/14: Allen, cont’d

Monday, 11/19: The Paradox of Rhetoric and Politics: Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*

Wednesday, 11/21: Mutz, cont’d

Monday, 11/26: A Matter of Style: Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*

Reading available via: (https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm)

Wednesday, 11/28: Presentations

Monday, 12/3: Presentations

Wednesday, 12/5: Presentations

Monday, 12/10: Extra Day*

Wednesday, 12/12: Last Day

Wednesday, 12/19: Final Exam (12:25-2:25)

*NOTE: Extra days are just that – extra days built into the semester in case class needs to be canceled due to an emergency, or in case we get behind, or in case presentations take longer than anticipated. If we don’t wind up using the extra days, we will watch and discuss a film on those days.*